

Research article

Media, Government, and COVID-19

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ORCIDGarcia Krisnando Nathanael: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9872-0692>**Abstract.**

In today's digital era, anyone including governments can access information using existing or new media. There is no denying that media outreach has expanded more than ever, and people now are inclined to instant and easy access to information. As a result, media can be very effective as a one-way propaganda tool for conveying governments' political policies, enabling them to disseminate information more quickly. With the social distancing policies due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of media by government agencies for circulating information to the public has increased. The authors used the Bullet Theory to dissect how media can become one-way propaganda in the delivery of policies of the Government of Indonesia in addressing the COVID-19 issue.

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1. Introduction

The media has a special feature where the media must produce and distribute knowledge in the form of information, views, and culture. The effort is a response to the collective social needs of society and individuals. The media is a channel connecting certain people with others, namely from the sender to the recipient of both individuals and audiences. Media is public, which can be enjoyed by anyone. Audience participation in the media is actually voluntary, but because humans are social creatures, indirectly the public will always want to be involved to participate [1].

Media as a tools of political communication can be used to starts propaganda. In the context of propaganda, the work system of the media will be effective in channeling what the propagandist wants. Because the media has a place in the public environment, it becomes a strategic thing, because the purpose of the persuasion is the manipulation of psychology of the general public [2]. Thus it can be concluded that political propaganda through the media actually becomes an effort to package issues, goals, influences, and political power by manipulating public psychology.

The world has recently experienced an extraordinary event that has caused some changes in the global social order system. Indonesia and the world are struggling to

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defend against the Covid-19 pandemic threat. With a high risk of transmission of this virus, it is only natural that prompt and appropriate handling by various parties is needed.

In handling pandemic cases faced by the Government of Indonesia at this time, the media acts as a propaganda effort, in the form of a delivery tool related to the handling policy of Covid-19 in Indonesia. The media is considered as the fourth power in a government or other terms *The Fourth Branch of Government* [3]. So that the media in this case is used as a medium for political messages, power and deliberately continuously produced, with the hope that the results of Indonesian society can meet the propaganda goals of the Indonesian government.

2. Theory

The Bullet Theory is a theory that discusses the assumptions "The theory suggests that the mass media can influence a very large group of people directly and uniformly by" shooting "or" injecting "them with appropriate messages designed to trigger a desired response". In hypodermic needle theory it is said that the media is very active and powerful, while the audience is passive. So that the media will easily hit or penetrate the target. [4].

Basically this theory is based on assumptions not on research findings but based on the assumption of "human nature" [5]. This opinion is in line with the three assumptions put forward by Davis and Baran:

1. Because people's actions are not influenced by social ties and are guided by uniform instincts, individuals attend events (such as media messages) in the same way.
2. Human nature inherited by people and their isolated social conditions make them receive and interpret media messages in a uniform way.
3. Thus media messages such as the symbolic "bullet" that attack each eye and produce direct, direct, uniform and therefore strong effects and thoughts.

Based on the preliminary presentation above, the author would like to analyze more deeply about the use of media by the Government of Indonesia related to the policy of handling the Covid-19 Pandemic, as a one-way propaganda effort, using the theoretical basis of *The Bullet Theory* with the contents contained in it.

2.1. Use of Media by the Indonesian Government

Living together in a community is already a human destiny. Humans as social beings have a basic need, namely communication with others. Meanwhile, the communication process can be interpreted as "Information Transfer" or messages (messages) from the sender of the message as a communicator and to the recipient of the message as a communicant. In general, according to Dan Nimmo communication is a process of social interaction that people use to arrange the meaning which is their image of the world (on which they act) and to exchange that image through symbols [6].

The role of communication is very important for humans in their daily lives, in accordance with the functions of communication that are: persuasive, educative and informative [7]. Almost all information or persuasion of the general public, placing mass media and other types as the main channel in its communication. Included in the realm of politics.

Political communication, which can currently be done by anyone, not knowing their age, position, religion, ethnicity, background, and politics, especially in an era of openness like this reform era in Indonesia. So it is with almost all corners of the world, where transparency and freedom in the context of information become the main thing [8].

Technology can not be separated from how political actors in this era carry out processes related to political communication. The technology is dominated by the mass media or later often called the mainstream media or embodied through a medium that is now called the new media.

The media is deliberately set as a one-way propaganda tool regarding policies made by the government, related to handling the Covid-19 pandemic. This statement is relevant to the theory put forward by Nwabueze and Okonkwo. According to an explanation from The Bullet Theory put forward by Nwabueze and Okonkwo, this situation indeed feels relevant in today's digital age. Even, it cannot be separated from the use of social media which is increasingly high, causing the higher possibility of the public being exposed to one-way propaganda issued by a media.

2.2. Indonesian Government Policy Regarding Covid-19

The media is the only media that is very effective. The media can be said as a "needle" that injects messages into the mind of the audience because it causes changes in the behavior and soul of the audience of the message. Where this injection is very effective against a large group of masses. As has already been said that the success

of propaganda is directly proportional to the possibility of using media to access information, which allows the higher effectiveness of one-way propaganda from media which is on the agenda setting of the Indonesian government. In addition, the current condition of society is also relevant to what is in *the bullet theory*. The public is actually no longer considered as a party that passively, but as an active.

In the first policy, many people responded poorly because President Jokowi was considered late and slow in handling this pandemic, especially in the absence of a real policy, many people saw other countries as a comparison, where the conditions of other countries had been very responsive by holding lockdowns, and actions it is considered more real for the community [9].

Regarding the second policy, which is an appeal to conduct social distancing or reduce physical contact that is close together, where it takes time to raise public awareness to do so, proving that the community status is active not directly affected by media coverage of government policies, due to consideration of the need to travel for work, and indeed the existence of a community that does not care about the facts of the reporting (*ignorant*). To help socialize health protocols to the public, the Indonesian government also works together with art-creative workers or *influencers*. With this activity it is hoped that what the Indonesian government wants to deliver its policy to the community is successful. [10].

Besides that, the Indonesian government's policy regarding Covid-19 is the existence of PSBB. In detail this policy contains restrictions on activities related to the community at large. A number of activities that involve the public are restricted, such as offices or institutions that are closed, restrictions on religious activities and restrictions on public transportation.

Data obtained from BPS (Badan Pusat Statistik) Indonesian statistic agency survey by netting as many as 87,379 thousand respondents showed the results of the public response to the existence of policies related to Covid-19 issued by the Indonesian government. Uniquely from this data, it can be concluded that the respondents' neglect of policy is dominated by male respondents and also young age groups. They neglected the health protocol because they felt the threat or vulnerability to Covid-19 was still far away. This group only feels the danger of Covid-19 if a family member or someone close to them is sick or dies from Covid-19. They can only realize the danger, if it has been affected health and economically. [11].

On the other hand, according to the authors of non-adherence of young people, men and society at large to the health protocol is influenced by the delivery of information by the government. The government's attitude which is often fickle, to the point of view

of experts, triggers confusion among residents. That uncertainty becomes even more apparent when differences arise between rules and field practice.

3. Conclusion

The existence of anxiety felt by the public because of seeing the news about the Covid-19 virus continuously, to make them a lot of hoarding food everyday, is the clearest evidence of how *The Bullet Theory* can still be considered relevant today. Although in certain cases such as the Indonesian government's policy, *The Bullet Theory* does not really meet the criteria of events in Indonesia. Because when viewed from the available data, the Indonesian people are actually not very responsive to the handling policy of Covid-19 which is reported to the media, instead the public is more responsive to other news.

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